

Vapor intrusion threatening our homes

2 NEWS Investigates: Digging up danger

By Pam Elliot

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DAYTON, Ohio (WDTN) - Residents in a section of Riverside have reason to be concerned about the air they're breathing in their own homes. The EPA is testing for vapor intrusion.

"I think vapor intrusion is a big issue for the environmental community. It's something we didn't recognize over the past," said Steve Renninger, EPA Region 5.

Boundaries of the site now being tested are the Mullins Rubber Products facility on the east, Pleasant Valley Avenue on the west, Bushnell and Hypathia Avenues on the north, and Valley Pike road on the south.

Chuck Norris got wind of a problem from his family who also lives in Riverside. They had received this letter in July requesting permission to collect air samples inside their home. They called, but got no answers.

The City Manger of Riverside, Bryan Chodkowski, agreed to an interview, though he didn't know much.

Pam Elliot: Is that troubling to you as the city manager?

Bryan Chodkowski: It's disappointing. I will say that it is disappointing that this administration and that city staff was not made aware directly from the EPA that this problem existed that this issue was present in our community.

The EPA directed 2 NEWS Investigates to this website about Valley Pike VOC. Valley Pike for the area of Riverside. VOC for volatile organic compound. There's a letter dated May 9 from the Ohio EPA to the U.S. EPA asking for help "due to the potential hazards posed to neighboring homes and businesses." The state found releases of two chemicals, tetrachloroethene or PCE and trichloroethene or TCE. Both can make you sick.

Steve Renninger with the U.S. EPA Region 5 is now the man in charge. I started calling him in August, but he didn't agree to sit down with me until three months later. He still hasn't answered residents.

Pam Elliot: Should these people be evacuated? How serious is this?

Steve Renninger: This is a situation that meets the criteria for what we call a time critical removal action, that means we feel it is important to move quickly on this.

"It's been a lot of action behind the scenes," explained Renninger. This summer he tested groundwater and took gas samples in the area of Hypathia and Bushnell Avenues. The drinking water is not the problem, it's the vapor that can enter homes.

Steve Renninger: These are the levels established by the health department for PCE. Anything above 60 is of concern. We saw it at 8200.

Pam Elliot: Oh my word.

Steve Renninger: They're very elevated.

PCE is a chemical used for dry cleaning and degreasing metal. The Ohio Health Department reports exposure to very high concentrations of PCE can be deadly.

Pam Elliot: Should these people be evacuated? How serious is this?

Steve Renninger: This is a situation that meets the criteria for what we call a time critical removal action, that means we feel it is important to move quickly on this.

Renninger told 2 NEWS Investigates he didn't want to say much until now because he wanted to come up with a solution first, which he says he has. He's prepared to install mitigation systems where tests show vapor intrusion, but he needs to sample air inside homes first. More than 100 homes might need to be ventilated.

Pam Elliot: So, I'm going to ask again if these residents are safe right now.

Steve Renninger: This is a team effort and part of that is having health departments on board. I can't answer health related questions.

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I took questions to the local and state health departments and public information officers from both referred me to Renninger, calling the EPA the lead agency.

The EPA says it does not know for sure the source of the contamination, but the Ohio EPA refers to Mullins Rubber Products in its May letter and 2 NEWS Investigates obtained a copy of a certified letter that was sent to Mullins giving the company notice of potential liability.

Mullins has been in trouble with the EPA before. In 2004 the company had to pay a \$350,000 fine for violating the Clean Air Act. The Vice President of the company, Bill Mullens, Jr. told 2 NEWS Investigates the company was not keeping paperwork properly. As far as this latest concern, Mullins said the company has never used PCE and therefore it's not responsible for a spill that would result in vapor intrusion.

There is now a public hearing scheduled for December 10 at Stebbins High School which is close to the area being tested, that's seven months after Ohio EPA asked for federal help.

If a source of contamination is not found, the testing and installing of mitigation systems would end up costing the EPA., that's taxpayers, potentially \$10,000 per home.

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Ms. Ashcraft, Please come to the December 10 meeting at Stebbins HS. The goal of the meeting is to have people sign forms that allow the EPA to come in and test their homes for the presence of PCE and TCE. If the test is found the EPA will offer to have a ventilation system installed for free to eliminate the threat from these chemicals. And please, encourage your neighbors, especially in the area within the streets of Hypathia, Pleasant Valley, Bushnell and Valley, to come to the meeting and agree to have their homes tested.

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